

## US History Week 12 Notes

### Nativism and Racism

Beginning in 1920, immigration into the United States once again increased dramatically. Approximately 110,000 people immigrated to the U.S. in 1919, and that number increased to more than 430,000 in 1920 and more than 800,000 in 1921. And as before, many native-born Americans saw the immigrants as a threat to their livelihood and their image of America. Congress, reacting to this widespread sentiment, passed the Emergency Quota Act of 1921.

Under this act, a new quota system would stem the influx of foreign-born citizens into the United States. The number of immigrants allowed to enter America for any given country was limited to three percent of the number of immigrants from that country already living in the United States as defined by the census of 1910. To further restrict immigration, in 1924 Congress adjusted the quota system so it was based on the census of 1890 when few southern Europeans had arrived.

The sensational Sacco and Vanzetti trial in 1921 underscored the anti-foreign attitude of many Americans. Nicola Sacco, a shoe factory worker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish peddler, were Italian immigrants and known atheists and anarchists. When the two were accused of killing a paymaster and a guard in a daylight robbery of a shoe factory, a notorious trial followed. During the trial, the judge and jury appeared overtly prejudiced against Sacco and Vanzetti because of their immigrant background and their political beliefs.

The trial, and determination of Sacco and Vanzetti's fate, dragged on for seven years, while protestors around the world organized rallies to show support and demand a new trial for the two doomed men. In the end, both men were executed on August 23, 1927.

As immigrants struggled for fair treatment, a force of evil had reconstituted. A new Ku Klux Klan, one focused against foreigners rather than blacks, was established in 1915 by William J. Simmons, a former preacher. Simmons would allow only native-born white Protestants into his organization, and he referred to America's melting pot as nothing more than a "garbage can." Klan membership rapidly grew to a peak of five million members in 1923.

Although the movement's strongest support was in the Midwest and South, the Klan's message spoke to individuals in all corners of America. Klan members wore robes, burned crosses, held dogmatic rituals, and organized mass demonstrations to protect its ideal of American life from African American, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and immigrant "corruption."

In the late 1920s, Americans finally recoiled from the hateful messages the Klan espoused and the violence of their actions. Infighting began to plague the Klan as factions squabbled over control of the large amounts of money collected through a \$10

initiation fee. When David C. Stephenson, the leader of the Indiana Klan, was convicted of assault that caused the death of a young woman, many of the remaining supporters deserted the Klan. Finally, a Congressional investigation launched to investigate money-laundering charges, revealed that a large part of initiation fee charged to members was used to pay kickbacks to local organizers to encourage additional recruitment.

## **Religion**

While some Americans were concerned with the increasing immigration into the United States; others feared modernism and new ideas might usurp the authority of the church. For many of the millions of people who lived in rural areas, towns, and small cities around the country, it was not the great urban migration that was a problem, it was that urban culture itself seemed to be wicked, materialistic, and detrimental to moral character.

As Americans abandoned the country in droves and moved to large cities, new ideas emerged among these urban transplants as the influence of modernism was taking hold. More than ever before, education was a priority in Americans' lives. Many states started to require students to attend school until the age of sixteen or eighteen. A professor from Columbia University, John Dewey, founded the progressive educational movement by promoting the principles of "learning by doing." Dewey's idea stated that teachers should educate students on traditional subjects as well as more practical life-skill topics.

Along with the changes in education, Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution and Karl Marx's suggestion that individuals were primarily motivated by economic motives became key points in shaping the progressive mindset. Modernist Christians, who mostly lived in large cities, attempted to connect new scientific advances with religion. They believed that science and religion could not only coexist, each could support the other's tenants and principles.

It was Darwin's contribution to Biology that religious fundamentalists despised most. They rejected the theory of evolution and hoped to eliminate all mention of the scientific advances made during the last century regarding the origins of the universe and the history of humankind. Fundamentalists believed that these new ideas minimized the importance of the Bible and contributed to the moral breakdown of young people.

To appease fundamentalists, three southern states, including Tennessee, adopted laws prohibiting the teaching of "any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible." The American Civil Liberties Union announced that it would finance a challenge to the constitutionality of the law if a teacher would knowingly violate it. Friends convinced John T. Scopes, a well-liked Biology teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, to teach evolution in his classroom, and he was immediately arrested. Lawyers from around the country came forward to defend him, and the stage was set for a sensationalistic event that would put progressive education on trial. The case, often referred to as the "Monkey Trial," began on July 13, 1925.

The State of Tennessee retained the services of Williams Jennings Bryan to prosecute Scopes. Bryan, a well-known Presbyterian fundamentalist and an accomplished speaker, had helped to popularize the fundamentalist movement. Bryan had begun to campaign against the teaching of evolution as early as 1921. Clarence Darrow, a trial lawyer from Chicago and self-described agnostic, volunteered to defend Scopes.

Reporters from large cities camped in the small Tennessee town reporting on the trial's spectacle. Spectators drawn by curiosity and publicity seekers captivated by the media-hype also crowded the streets of Dayton. The trial itself did not disappoint the public in terms of drama. Darrow even insinuated that the magnitude of the trial went well beyond the legal issue when he argued, "Scopes isn't on trial, civilization is on trial ... no man's belief will be safe if they win."

The judge presiding over the trial ruled that scientific testimony would not be allowed. Faced with this limitation, Darrow decided to try to attack the state's position, and he asked if Bryan would take the stand as an expert of the Bible. Bryan agreed and what followed was a bitter exchange between Darrow and Bryan that ended in a quick adjournment of the court when the two charged at one another, fists raised. Darrow's strategy was to point out Bryan's literal beliefs in the text of the Bible, including that a "great fish" swallowed Jonah, that Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs, and that Joshua had stopped the movement of the sun. Darrow's intention was to make Bryan appear irrational; a tactic that many reporters and spectators considered successful.

Ultimately, the court ruled that the real issue was whether or not Scopes taught evolution in his classroom. According to the court, Scopes had purposely violated the law and was fined \$100; though the state Supreme Court later overturned the fine on a technicality. Bryan died of a stroke five days after the trial ended, and his death was attributed to the stress of his testimony and the July courtroom heat.

## **Prohibition**

The era of national prohibition began in 1920 with the establishment of the Eighteenth Amendment and was enforced by the Volstead Act passed by Congress that same year. The Act forbade the manufacture and sale of beverages with an alcoholic content greater than .5 percent. Zealous supporters of this law, including many women and parishioners, believed that prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcohol would eliminate the social problems caused by intoxication.

Many Americans began fighting for prohibition long before 1920. Near the beginning of the twentieth century, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League crusaded for legal prohibition. The Anti-Saloon League became a powerful special interest and mobilized Protestant churches to elect candidates that were anti-alcohol. The practice of self-denial that emerged in support of the war effort led many to view alcohol as an unnecessary luxury. The Lever Act of 1917 outlawed the use of grain and other foodstuffs in the production of alcoholic beverages.

By the time Congress enacted a national prohibition, almost 75 percent of Americans lived in counties or states that already prohibited drinking alcohol. The movement, however, faced great resistance in large eastern cities where many social activities were built around the consumption of alcohol. Those who wanted to drink found ingenious ways around the law. Secret and illegal supplies of highly concentrated alcohol sprang up overnight. Citizens began regularly visiting “speakeasies,” secret bars where individuals gathered to socialize.

Americans consumed tremendous amounts of alcohol during prohibition. Women began drinking in record numbers, and youth found it exciting to “bootleg,” or smuggle liquor. Bootlegging became a major business, as many smuggled alcohol into the United States. Others found a new hobby in manufacturing “bathtub gin” and “home brew” for their own personal consumption. Sometimes, drinking highly concentrated homemade concoctions resulted in blindness or death.

Prohibition supplied organized crime with a massive influx of income. Although organized crime had long been a component of the landscape in large cities, mobsters like “Scarface” Al Capone reveled in their increasing power as booze distributors. Capone’s criminal empire, which extended beyond the sale of alcohol to include gambling and prostitution, netted him nearly \$60 million in 1927. In Chicago’s gang wars of the 1920’s, mobsters killed about 500 rivals in an effort to control the billion-dollar business of the underworld.

Law enforcement officials were unable, and in many cases unwilling, to stop the endless stream of illegal alcohol. The state and federal agencies charged with enforcing prohibition were understaffed, and many enforcement agents were susceptible to bribery. Many opponents of prohibition believed that the only way to change the law was to break it on a massive scale, so they tried to undermine enforcement efforts so that the law would be seen as meaningless.

In the end, the “noble experiment” of prohibition did not succeed. Few politicians called for an outright appeal of the amendment before 1930; however, leaders recognized the need to at least overhaul the law if it was to be enforced. The prohibition lobby rejected outright all attempts to modify the law, but enforcement of the law remained grossly under funded and understaffed. In 1933, the Eighteenth Amendment upholding national prohibition was repealed by the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment, which allowed the states to decide for themselves whether or not to support prohibition.

## New Culture

In addition to the political and social transformations brought about by prohibition, fundamentalism and nativism, the 1920s also witnessed a cultural transformation. In this postwar decade, many citizens, especially in larger urban areas, were embracing new forms of entertainment, discovering new recreational activities, and adopting the culture of consumerism. Literature and music were taking adventurous new strides, and the

women rights movement was making slow progress. In light of all these events, the writer F. Scott Fitzgerald dubbed this postwar period the “Jazz Age.”

In an era that saw a number of advances for women, the battle for the right to vote finally found closure. In 1918, President Wilson asked Congress to approve a Constitutional amendment to allow women the right to vote, but the Senate failed to pass it by two votes. The National Suffrage Association, led by Carrie Chapman Catt, continued to lobby and petition Congress. On June 4, 1919, the issue went before Congress once again, and this time it passed. The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was not ratified until August 21, 1920, and by that time the National Suffrage Association had changed its name to the League of Women Voters.

On the labor front, women found more opportunity for work, but the jobs were limited to a few fields such as clerical, teaching, or roles in the service industry. These were jobs that many men considered too “womanly” to actively pursue for themselves. Wages for women typically remained low, especially when compared to the salary of a male performing the same job. In 1920, more than eight million women worked outside the home, and that number increased to well over ten million by the end of the decade.

A drastic alteration in appearance and values helped to distinguish the “new woman” of the 1920s. Known as “flappers,” their look and attitude was characterized by knee-length or higher dresses, rolled down stockings, smoking, ample use of makeup, and even dancing the “Charleston.” The traditionalists, of whom a majority of women still considered themselves, looked down on flappers for what they felt was a disregard for morality. Traditionalist were also alarmed by a rising divorce rate, which was fueled by relaxed divorce laws and a new sense of independence among women. This rate started to decline at the end of the decade due to the Great Depression.

Coinciding with the gains made by women during the 1920s, was a revolution in African American culture. The artistic, political, and literary achievements were due in part to a massive migration of blacks from southern states to northern cities. This move began in 1915 when northern industries were experiencing labor shortages due to the war. In New York City alone the black population more than doubled between the years of 1920 to 1930. Living in the northern states, blacks found they were able to speak out and act more freely, and thus their political and cultural influence started to expand. Jazz music, the creation of black musicians working together in New Orleans in the late nineteenth century, started to gain widespread national popularity. Caucasians and African Americans alike were drawn to jazz’s nontraditional rhythms and melodies.

The musical roots of jazz can be traced to post-Reconstruction traditions, such as spirituals, ragtime, and stringbands. Blending these musical forms with European influences resulted in a distinctive, improvisational sound, which spread across the country as African Americans moved northward. Louis Armstrong, who moved from New Orleans to Chicago to join Joseph Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band in 1922, is praised as one of the fathers of the jazz movement and an extraordinary musical talent. Edward “Duke” Ellington, a significant innovator of early jazz, moved from Washington D.C. to New York

City. Ellington started playing at Harlem's Cotton Club in 1927, during which time his compositions, including large ensembles of twelve to fourteen instruments, foreshadowed the 1930s swing movement.

It was in the same New York City borough where the Cotton Club enjoyed its fame that the African American cultural revolution found its center. The "Harlem Renaissance" gave rise to such figures as Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes. These artists found their voice through the patronage of white Americans who found such creativity inspirational in times when many were becoming increasingly disillusioned.

Garvey was an influential political leader whose platform was based on promoting black expressionism and racial pride, ending imperialism in Africa, and unifying the dispersed black populations. Garvey came to New York from Jamaica in 1916, bringing with him the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), an organization he started two years earlier. The purposes of the UNIA were to help black citizens relocate to Africa (the "Back to Africa Movement"), to sponsor black businesses, and to help fund the Black Star Line Steamship Company. Most of Garvey's financial endeavors were unsuccessful and ultimately failed, and he was eventually sent to prison in 1925 for defrauding investors. In 1927, President Calvin Coolidge pardoned Garvey and had him deported back to Jamaica.

McKay, one of the first literary standouts during the Harlem Renaissance, published a collection of poems called *Harlem Shadows* in 1922. Some of McKay's poem titles included "If We Must Die" and "To the White Fiends." Langston Hughes, considered to be one of the best poets of the period, described his feelings during his first visit to Harlem by saying "Harlem! I dropped my bags, took a deep breath, and felt happy again." Hughes published his first compilation in 1926, titled *The Weary Blues*.

Many African American women also found their voice during the Harlem Renaissance. Zora Neale Hurston, considered by many to be the most prolific African American writer of her time, explored themes of female identity and love in her books *Dust Tracks on a Road* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

The literary revival of the 1920s extended well beyond Harlem. In fact, the postwar era seemed to influence many young writers who had become disillusioned by the hopeful optimism before the war, the harsh realities of the war itself, the tactics of the fundamentalist, and Klan brutality. Some of the more prominent American writers became expatriates, while many others were happy to just travel abroad, gathering cultural and life experiences.

Gertrude Stein, an expatriate living in Paris, is credited as being one of the first writers to popularize a modernist writing style starting with her 1906 book *Three Lives*. Stein also helped to name this new generation of authors when she wrote to Ernest Hemingway saying, "All of you young people who served in the war, you are the lost

generation.” The idea of a “lost generation” took hold, and no one typified the epithet more than F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald was an almost overnight success, with his 1920 novel *This Side of Paradise*, which became very popular with the young flapper culture. Fitzgerald’s second novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), achieved much critical acclaim, but by the end of the decade Fitzgerald’s personal life fell into ruin. He became an alcoholic and his wife was “prone to fits of madness.” Eventually, Fitzgerald moved to Hollywood to find work as a scriptwriter, but he never regained the level of success he enjoyed in the 1920s.

Ernest Hemingway, a WWI veteran, moved away from traditional writing styles and instead developed his own lean, declarative style. The publication of his first two novels, *The Sun also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) marked the beginning of a writing career that would include a Pulitzer Prize for his 1952 novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*.

The writers of the lost generation also included William Faulkner and T. S. Eliot. Among Faulkner’s contributions to early modernist literature were the harsh war novels *Soldier’s Pay* (1926), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and *As I Lay Dying* (1930). The poet T. S. Eliot exemplified the modernist ideal in much of his work. In *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot’s disenchantment and sense of helplessness were palpable and his work became a benchmark for modern literature.

Despite all of the turmoil following WWI, including the disillusioned works of the lost generation, America saw great economic prosperity. The 1920s witnessed a spectacular growth in industrial output, business expansion, and consumerism. Helping to sustain this growth, the Federal Reserve Board allowed interest rates to remain low and the Federal government assumed a firm *laissez-faire* attitude toward business.

Many other factors also contributed to the economic expansion, including the mass production of electricity. More electricity was being generated in America by 1929 than the combined output of the rest of the world. This helped to spur the mass production of automobiles, refrigerators, heavy building equipment, vacuum cleaners, and radios. Between 1921 and 1929, industrial output was doubled, and a finished automobile was rolling off the Ford assembly line in Rouge River Michigan every ten seconds. The Ford Motor Company, founded in 1903, and its Model T automobile greatly contributed to the social and economic impact the car had on the nation. When the Model T was introduced in 1908, its price tag was \$850, but by 1924 the car was selling for no more than \$290. Frederick Taylor developed a method to standardize the manufacturing process through a step-by-step analysis and factories that applied his methodology were increasing their production.

The mass production of the car was perhaps one of the more important economic advents during the 1920s. No longer a novelty of the wealthy, the efficient assembly line lowered the cost of a car enough that over 30 million were owned in America by 1930. Fast transportation, revenue generating gasoline taxes, and growing dependency on the

automobile gave rise to suburb expansion in cities nationwide. The auto industry's success also drove economic expansion in other areas. It created a need to manufacture more tires, glass, and petroleum products. The proliferation of gas stations soon followed, along with the people needed to staff them, and tourism flourished.

A multitude of willing consumers were also eager to experience other forms of leisure. Heroes such as baseball's George ("Babe") Ruth, boxing's Jack Dempsey, and swimming's Gertrude Ederle encouraged a growing fan base and huge ticket sales for professional sports. Ederle held eighteen world records by the time she was seventeen, and in 1926 swam the English Channel on her second attempt. The new home entertainment center of the era, the radio, also helped popularize sports. Starting in 1921, radios began appearing throughout American homes, even though long-ranged broadcasting was not viable until late in the decade.

Motion pictures, mostly a novelty until WWI, found a purpose in war propaganda with the "Hang the Kaiser" films. Earlier films, including 1903's *The Great Train Robbery*, were shown in five-cent theaters, known as "nickelodeons." In the 1920s, movies began to show their true potential, reflecting the social climate, adapting to new technologies, and giving rise to a shared experience nation-wide. Unlike radio broadcasts that varied from region to region, people going to "picture palaces" to watch movies saw the same show. The first "talkie," *The Jazz Singer*, was released to a delighted public in 1927, marking the end of silent films.

The popularity of the film was also attracting the nation's attention to another novelty—the movie star. At many times more recognizable than the nation's leaders, top movie stars were popular enough to demand salaries that eclipsed the salary of the President of the United States. Stars such as Rudolph Valentino and Clara Bow began to wow audiences. Valentino, one of the first film idols and considered to be consummate "Latin lover", captured the attention of millions with his silent films *The Sheik* and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Bow, one of the first sex symbols of the movies, attracted the flapper filled audiences in mass. Her films such as *Mantrap* and *It* demonstrated her depth and range, and inspired many young to emulate her.

Film production was soon big business, and during the 1920s it was under the control of a few large companies. Production, distribution, and advertising were all business aspects that were handled internally by companies such as Paramount, MGM, and Warner Brothers. Mostly, the headquarters of each of these media giants was in New York City, but the actual filming process was taking place in Hollywood-taking advantage of the warm, sunny southern California climate. The rise of Hollywood signaled the beginning of a new industry that continues to influence American culture and imagination to this day.